A N

ESSAY on GENIUS.

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AN ESSAY ON GENIUS.

IN TWO PARTS.

By the Rev. A. PURSHOUSE, A. M.

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ADVERTISEMENT.

IF, from the juſtneſs of its precepts, from coercive argument, and illuſtrative truth, the following Essay ſhall be judged by the public as not altogether deſtitute of merit, the Second Part will in time follow of courſe; but if the want of ſucceſs ſhould indicate that the writer has been guilty of a miſapprehenſion of his talents, the vexation of diſappointed hopes will effectually ſuppreſs the remainder, and will be a ſufficient puniſhment for the attempt.

A N

ESSAY on GENIUS.

PART the FIRST.

AT leaſt, when men preſume on claſſic ground,
And letters ſpread a chaſter page around:
At leaſt, when Princes labour to refine,
And the kind Muſes ſmile on the deſign:
When on each noble art perfection dawns,
And the nice eye the meaneſt error ſcorns;
Wit, as th' immediate fountain, we expect,
In judgement modell'd, and with taſte correct;

Strange thing to err, when what we wiſh to find,
Is mark'd ſo fairly to th' attentive mind;
To try the depth, and to eſſay the courſe,
And trace up nature to her genial ſource;
Juſtly, as while her ſtreams yet roll, to learn
What ſcope they take, and where her channels turn.
To lop redundant thought with modeſt fear
And rule with judgment in the bold career.
Fair ornament aſſiſts a lofty gait,
As coſtly robes ſo well accord with ſtate;
Yet there's a mean, that verges on exceſs,
Between a ſplendid and a tawdry dreſs;
To overact it——nothing is ſo bad,
For folk will ſwear, you're either drunk or mad.
Copy the beſt, why, 'tis but juſt to ſhow,
What Homer wrote three thouſand years ago:
'Tis imitation, with a tarniſh'd ore,
And only writing, what was ſaid before.
A turn that's new, the modern wiſely tries,
To point his lays, and to effect ſurpriſe;
Here epithets in gay attire advance,
There metaphor intwines the mazy dance;

Wrapt in a cloud, and ſafe from vulgar eyes,
Plain ſenſe retires, and dark enigmas riſe.

The gaudy flow'rs, and figurative ground,
With which our firſt productions now abound,
Are but an artful dreſs upon the whole,
And all a ſurface too without a ſoul;
A maudlin ſubſtitute for glowing ſenſe,
Whence puling wits aſſert their bald pretence.
A ſplendour uniformly ſpread degrades.
The ſkilful painter mixes lights and ſhades;
This part expos'd, affords a true delight,
And that, involv'd within the ſhades of night.
Luſtre, too brilliant in the meaner line,
The contraſt leſſens in the great deſign;
Th' harangues of Neſtor claim no ſtricter art,
Than blab Therſites in th' ignoble part.
Juſt ſo ſome Viſto with malignant taſte,
By money led on, and by folly chac'd,
Scans o'er the ſcene, that nature well deſign'd
To catch the eye, and dwell upon the mind,

Nature reſiſtleſs to encharm he ſcans,
And ſets his judgment to improve her plans.
The wilds, where fancy would put on a gloom,
And meditate, with mean exotics bloom;
The riſing hill, that aggrandiz'd the ſcene,
Is levell'd with the glebe upon the green;
The vale aſcends, to finiſh the deſign,
All rankly dreſs'd, and uniformly fine.
View the wide ſpace, you no where can deſcry
A part ſurpaſſing, to attract the eye;
No varying figures, to divert you find,
And lead up objects to the craving mind.

Methinks, I hear a trait'rous Syren ſay,
" Here radiant joys in everlaſting day,
" Pure and unmix'd, an heavenly ſource declare,
" And ſuch as Gods alone delight to ſhare.
" Here ſmiling Venus keeps her gentle court,
" And wanton Loves around the Goddeſs ſport;
" And Fauns and Satyrs on the greensward ſpring,
" And Zephyrs play on the fantaſtic wing:

" Here birds unceaſing warble in the trees,
" And ſweets Arabian perfume the breeze:
" Here genial ſuns, and here are cooling bow'rs,
" Here fruits autumnal, and here vernal flow'rs,
" Here nature's kind, and here ſuch pleaſure reigns,
" As hope ne'er ſaw, and virtue ne'er attains."
But in ſuch charms, true taſte aſſumes no part,
Where adverſe natures are commix'd by art;
Such dear deceit, incongruous to truth,
Finds no excuſe, but in th' exceſs of youth;
Th' imagination reaches far above
The air-built tow'r, and arrogance of love.

Miſtaken forms by ſimple modes to ſhun,
A wit o'erlab'red by a taſte undone;
'Tis the ſure method to reduce the heart,
From nature's book to copy ev'ry part.
And next your rules from ancient bards derive,
The bards that keep expiring wit alive;
Not ſervilely their labours to explore,
And ev'ry theme in raptures to adore;

But read their conſtant graces with reſpect,
And with compaſſion note a rare defect:
Thoſe ſtrive with emulation to outrun,
And theſe be ſtudiouſly warn'd to ſhun.

Conſider too, that all the wealth we uſe,
Is duly reckon'd in the way we chooſe;
'Tis by compariſon, we merits weigh,
What's great in this, in that's a mean eſſay.
Well-----if the Muſes, in a partial hour,
Smile on the birth, and grant ſuperior pow'r,
Apology we need, if idle grown,
We fold our arms, and let the ſtake alone:
We need reproof, ſhould we not uſe it well,
To ſhame, and make us anxious to excel.
The ancients left us all that pains could lend,
Or art deviſe, or genius comprehend;
Such to our wonder, as a taſk we ſtate,
Works to reſolve by, works to emulate.
At laſt, thro' ages dark, the moderns roſe,
Gave genius laws, and taught us to compoſe;

They

They broke the clouds, which low'ring in the ſphere
Of learning, had obſcur'd a brighter year;
And fix'd the rule, Democritus annex'd
To verſe inſpir'd, which minor wits perplex'd;
Barbarian works, in days when ruins ceaſe,
Point how inſtruction moves the perfect piece.

Yet may we riſe, where mortal never ſoar'd,
Find things unthought, know regions unexplor'd;
For God to man has knowledge giv'n before,
And ſome reſerv'd for future times in ſtore,
And future ages will confeſs the ſtate
Of nature, ſtill as dark and intricate.
Once all was new, till each ſucceeding age
It's pow'rs perceiv'd, and added to the page;
New paths, new ſources, to the ſearching eye
Appear'd, Invention ſaw a vaſt ſupply.
To the firſt ages, and the barb'rous race,
The good of man, and love of fame we trace;
For ſome improv'd, or new diſcov'ry made,
E'en there's a debt, that never can be paid.

In

In regions, where bright ſcience ſhed a ray,
That beam'd from th' influence of a golden day;
More pow'rful aids a happier ſong impart,
Inſpir'd by nature, and improv'd by art.
Homer ſurpaſſes in impetuous fire,
And Virgil tempers judgment with deſire;
The climax riſing more polite and chaſte,
Pope lives the pattern of the fineſt taſte.
Wit's ſeeds are firſt embody'd at the birth,
The rule of art, is to improve their worth;
Age will give judgment, as the parts dilate,
And taſte will follow, as you cultivate:
To form the work that ſhall to ages ſhine
With theſe muſt care and application join.
Did we but weigh, how much depends on care,
Did we, reſolv'd to riſe, the wings prepare;
Shake ſloth aſide, and ev'ry feather plume,
And glad into the heights of thought preſume;
Many a region yet will knowledge teach,
A ſummit's there, which no man yet could reach,
The ways of thought can be but partly known,
And meaſur'd by the eye of God alone.

'Tis

'Tis not before us, the defect is found,
But in the vacant ſoul, that moves around;
As ſeed, that in the unturn'd ſoil is laid,
Grows in lean bloſſoms, or is ſoon decay'd:
So where kind nature would her gifts impart,
'Tis all a barren head, and an unfeeling heart.
Great bard of fame, Meonian Muſe, had fate
Reſerv'd thy laurels for a modern date,
As yet as green, as blooming had they ſpread,
Wide round the earth, and high their lofty head!
Sagacious bard, thy piercing eye had ſeen
New ſprings of action in each buſy ſcene;
To ſtate and time new theories belong,
Yet all an equal ſubject for thy ſong!
As yet a lyre inglorious lies unſtrung,
As yet a tale of valour to be ſung:
No more ſhall babes in liſping numbers tell,
How Cæſar conquer'd, and how Ilion fell;
The fields of Creſſy, Henry's wide alarms,
The Ganges ſuppliant, and the ſeas in arms,
The ſun of Albion riſing from afar,
And Rodney laurel'd in his trident car,

Inſpire the muſe, here Britiſh worth belongs,
Swells on the lyre, and bears to nobler ſongs!
And God, who ſcoop'd the vallies deep and neat,
Who handed the huge mountains to their ſeat,
Who orders the rotations of the ſpheres,
And their long periods of diff'rent years,
Who world with world harmoniouſly combines,
With other ſyſtems other great deſigns,
In vain conceive we, and declare in part,
He riſes ſtill, and baffles all our art!

In things diſcover'd, ſtill there's much to find,
There many properties conceal'd behind;
Like embers ſmother'd, ſome a life proclaim,
And wait an agent to awake the flame;
Some, like a chaos, wild and dark we ſee,
And none ſo perfect as they ought to be.
Wholly to cloſe unfiniſh'd things, demands
The eyes of Argus, and Briareus' hands.
To point out error, is to ſet us right,
And hidden beauties ſhould be brought to light;

This

This to improve, exacts a skilful line,
In that there's praise, to hazard the design;
Who turns the wheel, another's wits devise,
Claims half the merit, and divides the prize.
Others have thought, despondently they say,
Weigh'd letters well, and turn'd them ev'ry way.
What can they add? the only vein they know,
Is empty'd quite, and closed long ago:
'Tis but an empty echo they can boast;
What can they add? an echo is the most----
Tho', of invention, song we call possess'd,
'Tis all an imitation at the best;
From partial causes we a whole survey,
Some form it this, and some another way;
How many rich, and vary'd pictures dawn
Thro' the thin veil, that shades the blushing morn.
Let such then yield, who've not a head to trust;
Whose envy lifts them scarce above the dust:
Mine is a thought, that much has been deny'd,
And, granted this, there's much to be supply'd.

Indulge, ye Muses, then my votive hours,
High on your mount, and deep within your bow'rs:

Give me your conſecrated fount to ſhare,
O let me drink, and thirſt for ever there;
And lead me panting to that myſtic maze,
Where I may ſing, and teach of all your ways.
Ye Nine, attend the lay, for now belong,
The aids of fancy, and the rage of ſong;
Conceptions vaſt, yet ſtooping to explain,
Strength to perſiſt, and art to guide the rein.
When firſt the artiſt, ſwollen with the feat,
Built the tight bark, and ſpread the ſingle ſheet,
Loud was the ſeaman's boaſt, who dar'd to hand
The ſail aloft, and courſe along the ſtrand:
But thirſt for knowledge, or a love of gain,
His fears ſubdues, he tempts the boundleſs main;
Th' Herculean bound'ries he defies behind,
And meets the concourſe of the weſtern wind.
New regions open to his wond'ring ſight,
He paſſes them, and truth buoys into light;
Sublime he riſes from old ocean's bed,
An Atlas, the round world upon his head.
So, with faint hopes, the muſe revolves within
The bold deſign, and pauſes to begin;

Her

Her modeſty withholds, her ſtrength, her age,
Forbid the wanton ſtripling to engage.
Yet driv'n th' unbeaten limits to purſue,
To ſearch minutely in the given view;
From her keen eye perhaps ſhe may as yet
A ray diſcloſe, that leads to perfect wit:
Or to the wand'ring ſteps impart the road;
Or raiſe an urgent law upon the code;
Error deriv'd from prejudice diſplay,
And learning active to its own decay.
If not, repeat again the rules of old,
And cleanſe the ruſt and ruins from the mold;
Remind the mem'ry the rewards of care,
And ſave the bard from ruſhing to deſpair.
If not, retire from the obtruſive bent,
And meet forgiveneſs for the juſt intent.

Wit is the art, from nature to ſupply
Thought's hidden beauties to th' aſtoniſh'd eye.
Invention bears the palm, but this alone
Is not the ſign, by which the bard is known;

Great

Great merit lies, in giving things grown old,
A ſhape and tint, as caſt from a new mold.
True wit, intuitive in all we ſay,
Is knowledge leaning to a perfect way;
The knowledge all thoſe ſources to ſubdue,
Whence thought proceeds, and action ſtrikes to view:
Form'd or unform'd, the common or unknown,
What others claim, or what the bard alone,
Rip'ning with zeal, or yet in embryo ſome,
Tales that are paſt, or preſent, or to come,
Alike included in their ſep'rate part,
Are grav'n myſterious on the favour'd heart!
Sure ſuch perfection is not the advance
Of nat'ral cauſes, nor the lot of chance.
The ſtable laws of nature to controul?
Sure 'tis an inſtinct foſter'd in the ſoul;
A ſp'rit divine, forth iſſuing at the nod
Of ſerious Fate, and ſanction'd by a God.

'Tis then a ſpirit, that the work inſpires,
A fancy pregnant with celeſtial fires;

Which,

Which, to acquire the riot of applauſe,
Submits to judgement, and the critic's laws.
And here, would you a flatt'ring road purſue,
Keep but one ſcope, one pointed ſcope in view.
Who violates like fundamental laws,
Nor merit has, nor ſhadow of applauſe;
No Syren-graces can excuſe the line,
No error's ſuffer'd from the firſt deſign;
For if they tire our patience who delay,
Thoſe move our anger who miſlead the way.

Order perſpicuous thro' the whole ſhould run,
As planetary ſyſtems round the ſun.
This regular purſuit we wiſh to find,
To conſtitute the perfect in it's kind,
Tho' much diverſify'd, the matter muſt
Appear conſiſtent, and the whole be juſt;
That ev'ry member to the theme belong,
And all conſpire to magnify the ſong.
Like to the ſtream, where endleſs channels flow,
And mix ther currents with the waves below;

The ſtream, whoſe waters at the fountain-head,
In glaſſy flow ſcarce murm'ring thro' the bed,
United thus, and all itſelf ſurpaſt,
Nobly which billows in a ſea at laſt.

Reſolv'd your theme, and to one ſcope confin'd,
And the whole fabric faſhion'd in the mind;
Then with unlabour'd eaſe diſcloſe the dawn,
Calm as the ſpirit of the riſing morn.
In the firſt view, thus far muſt be reveal'd,
The ſubject known, but fable be conceal'd;
Moſt pleas'd the reader is, when from his eyes,
Each line intrudes upon him by ſurprize.
As the young bird is panting firſt from home,
From ſpray to ſpray, from tree to tree to roam;
With trembling pinions next preſumes to fly,
Then dares a paſſage thro' the liquid ſky:
So riſe with caution, judge your efforts well,
And ever leave an op'ning to excel;
He ends, who boaſts an impotent command,
An air-tow'r builder with a ſparing hand.

A nice

A nice connection in the parts diſpoſe;
A ſymmetry, whence nought excreſcent grows;
Strong ſenſe abounding thro' the whole career,
Clear yet conciſe, and lively yet ſevere.
Ambiguous words muſt give a juſt offence,
Two meanings are a burden to the ſenſe;
Here the vile herd of commentators run,
Like froſt in May, or ſpots upon the ſun;
Be clear, the gloomy vermin ſteal away,
As miſts diſpel'd before the face of day:
Deſcript or moral ſhould be always pure,
They grow a riddle, as they grow obſcure.
And let no roots extraneous be found,
Nor reptiles crawling on Hibernian ground;
This breaks the order, and connecting ſoul,
And leaves a yawning chaſm upon the whole.

Yet of all aids the Muſe aſpires to bring,
The ſenſe muſt be accordant to the thing.
Tho' ſlaves ape lords, and ſtrut in lace all o'er,
The babblers will betray the borrow'd ſtore;

The carriage, gait, or manners are amiſs,
There's ſomething aukward, and the world will hiſs.
So things, if dreſs'd in thought, too high or low,
The muſcles move, and fits of laughter flow:
Does Sneak aſſert? we ſmile at the event----
If Cato ſtoops, ſuch conduct we reſent.
Impartial reaſon will reſtrain your fire,
Teach when to fall, and when you may aſpire.
Reaſon demands that characters be ſuch,
That nothing ſpeak too little, or too much;
A nice propriety each action grace,
And ev'ry feature proper to each face:
Who gives grave Neſtor the loud jeer of youth,
Offends, in that he violates the truth.

Ever in motion, muſt you turn the thought,
This looſely gay, and that be highly wrought.
For ever ſoaring? you miſtake the rule,
And all you catch is but a gaping fool;
To fall with honour is the nicer part,
To riſe, is more of nature than of art;

Familiar

Familiar objects eaſe the lab'ring rhyme,
And gently let us down from the ſublime.
In ſweet ſimplicity this ſteals the ſoul
Away, that blooms a beauty thro' the whole.
The lofty here, the ſerious there the rule,
And irony conceals the ridicule;
Gay fancy wantons upon beds unknown,
And faſhions ſportive chaplets of her own.
The work much like a proſpect ſhould be ſeen,
With art and nature well diſpos'd between.
Contraſted forms by diff'rent means ſurprize,
Here cultur'd fields, and there rude foreſts riſe;
'Tis pleaſing o'er the diſtant ſcene to trace
The lawns, the lowlands, and the riſing baſe,
Hill ſwell o'er hill, and grateful to the view,
The wild coherence riſe in order due.

Thus o'er the ſcene in diff'rent lights diſpoſe,
Or what is great, or plain, or wildly grows;
Nor yet ridiculous, aſpire to lave
The Malvern ſummits with the Severn's wave.

Each ſite determine to its proper claſs,
The whole a various, yet conſiſtent maſs.
And while the lawns you range, or mountains climb,
Mark well the point, that bears to the ſublime;
Expect there, till the happy hour attend,
No toil atchieves that, eaſe muſt recommend:
Proud and impetuous, the Muſe attains
At once her ends, in the ſublimeſt ſtrains;
Snatch'd up to heav'n, ſhe ſcoffs at human laws,
No limits check her, and no peril awes,
With Godlike ſtride from ſphere to ſphere ſhe ſtalks,
And pities mortals in their pigmy walks.

Reaſon with fancy? Here the blindneſs lies,
Which acts by chance, and catches by ſurprize;
A ſally glowing with the ſoul's applauſe,
Forc'd by no art, and govern'd by no laws!
When the Muſe ſoars into ſome noble height,
She breaks the fetters, that would check her flight;
Yet in th' excurſion takes ſenſe ſide by ſide,
And truth tho' diſtant may be e'er deſcry'd;

And if with order ſomewhat ſhe diſpenſe,
Soon ſhe repays an ample recompence.
Reaſon with fancy? Rules of reaſon tend
To ſettle meaſures, that they comprehend.
'Tis fruitleſs to attempt to bring to light,
A cauſe involved in eternal night;
To ſtay the progreſs of poetic fire;
To fix the limits, where it ſoar no high'r:
By reaſon, principles ſo dark to ſhow,
And point out whence they are, and where they go?
As ſoon the winged path you'll draw, as ſoon
Unveil the ſtate of knowledge in the moon.

But think not thus a privilege is meant,
To hold deformities from heaven ſent:
If conſecrate is fancy's ev'ry word,
Some wit would fancy what is moſt abſurd;
The more audacious, with a prompt reſource,
Need greater judgement to direct their courſe;
If Pegaſus beyond all limits pant,
The Muſe's rage becomes a perfect rant.

Fancy alone is but a wild conceit,
With rapture colour'd, but with whim replete;
'Tis like a pile, where various matter's ſpent,
Without connection, and with no intent;
A ſordid maſs, where luſtre lies abus'd
And growing ſtill, and more and more confus'd;
A chaos this, with one unerring rule,
It ſubjects all alike to ridicule.
In wit, as ſcience, order is the ſoul;
Form in the parts adds beauty to the whole.
They turn the ſcheme, who would a fabric raiſe,
And ſearch out grandeur by a thouſand ways;
Examine the materials with care,
How much, how valued, and the whole compare;
Now due proportions with the graces ſcan,
And raiſe the tow'ring ſtructure from a plan.
When thus with art and order ſtrength accords,
True taſte approves it, and the ſoul applauds.

Yet while each verſe you name it's proper part,
Forget not the appeal unto the heart;

Here

Here try the paſſions, and with dext'rous ſkill
Conduct the docile man the way you will;
And teach preſuming happineſs to know
The lot of pain, the wretched undergo.
But where ſtern fate, with bitter rancour, throws
On the vex'd ſhoulders an exceſs of woes;
Remark the mean, that fixes limits fit,
Be wiſe to ſtifle the low rage of wit;
Ulyſſes, old and haraſs'd, muſt maintain
A graceful ſorrow, or you loſe our pain.
And where Alcides fits the Centaur's veſt,
And the keen poiſon rankles in his breaſt,
A flood of pity will his pangs ſupply,
Then ſhut the gangrene from the public eye;
The groſs diſplay we all allow is juſt,
But the chaſte ſtomach loathes it with diſguſt.

Let one great moral grow from the deſign;
To this advert the ſenſe of ev'ry line.
And where, as thro' life's chequer'd ſcenes you paſs,
And ſketch the croud, as from the faithful glaſs,

You

You hit on rhymes, whence caſual morals flow,
And fav'rite follies ſhall reſiſt below;
In courtly ſtrains, and ſoft addreſs, entice
The murm'ring ſpirit to receive advice.
In vain the pedant labours to advance
His ends, with all the ſpite of arrogance;
The pulpit's thunder, the recluſe's rules,
The ſtage's cant, and the poor pride of ſchools;
The throng rebelling will forbearance ſtretch,
And laugh at all the lumber of the wretch.
But where, from the reſult of fate, you trace
A maxim ſuitable to time, or place;
A great, an urgent rule of life you ſtate,
That flatters by it's known intrinſic weight;
With free deſign, and ſubtle art enrol
The verſe, a juſt appendage to the whole.
Such executes at once a double part,
And ent'ring at the head, ſubdues the heart;
Such gives the grave a ſerious delight,
The gay applaud, and knaves acknowledge right.

The Pow'rs above with ſacred awe declare,
Let all accord to due ſubmiſſion there;

Whate'er

Whate'er the miſeries that mortals know,
'Tis Heaven wills them, and they muſt be ſo.
And if an impious rant, aſſault the ſky,
Preface the outrage with apology.
Grace, love, and virtue on religion wait,
A hopeful wretched, and a happy great;
Vice envies yet, and yet again her ways,
And ſeeks the flames that round her altars blaze,
But ſeeks in vain, impervious are ſeen
Gulph roll on gulph, and ſea on ſea between.

Tho' ſtrict attention to theſe laws be paid,
And each thought claſs'd and regularly weigh'd;
Yet in the choice of words the pureſt teſt,
That verſe to moſt advantage may be dreſs'd,
Here reſts the art, from genius this is due,
For fools and madmen think as well as you.
Expreſſion, as the poliſh'd mirrour bright,
Muſt throw the ſtrongeſt image to the ſight:
Clear and diſtinct muſt each idea flow,
And ſtrong and lively muſt the colours glow;

Each word ſo apt, each thought ſo cloſe and round,
That nothing more expreſſive may be found.
Yet not ſo nice are words to be convey'd,
As ſuits the ſtrictneſs of the prudiſh maid;
A homefelt vigour muſt the whole impart,
A warmth that tranſports, yet not cloys the heart,
Now high, now low, as ſtated things require,
Sink with fatigue, and follow with deſire.
The force of ſympathy is the great ſoul
Of words, that gives reſemblance of the whole.
With the bare breaſt, and ſtarting nerves, they ſtrain
Up the high hill, and ſpeed along the plain:
Heave with the rolling ſurge beyond the reach
Of ſight, or proudly foam upon the beach:
Or, where the lone owl wings her tardy flight,
Still as the gloom, the harbinger of night.
And here th' adjuſtment of the pauſes ſhines
Conſpicuous, and the interſected lines:
And Hector, furious at the baſe deſign,
Breaks in, and interrupts the flowing line.
Here the true vigour of the muſe is found,
Th' addreſs of words, and confidence of ſound;

Where diction conſonant to thought's refus'd,
Arraign'd the verſe is, and the bard accus'd.
Nor art, nor toil can to the ſummit ſteal
The ſtone of Siſyphus, nor ſtop Ixion's wheel.

And now with curious management explore
The fund of words, and cull them o'er and o'er;
Know whence the graceful muſe you may advance,
What to reject, and what to countenance.
Degen'rate terms avoid, as feaſts impure,
A vulgar phraſe the reader can't endure;
He ſcorns th' ignoble language of the throng,
Holds up his head, and ſwells above the ſong.
When to a fav'rite word you partial are,
And wrap a blemiſh up with niceſt care,
'Tis then in difficulties you engage,
Protub'rant boughs grow ſtubborn, as in age;
Reſtore the tree, it cannot be too ſoon
To ſtop misſhapes: and each excreſcence prune;
Superfluous words are apt to cauſe diſguſt,
As comes a ſurfeit from a ſated luſt.

Weigh well the nice diſtinctions in the ſcale,
The pow'rs definitive that mark your tale;
That other words beſt ſuit with other rhymes,
And fitly place them in their proper climes.
The moan of elegy will ill appear,
In words that rapidly attack the ear;
And paſſion be but languidly expreſs'd,
In pomp of art, and reas'ning numbers dreſs'd.
Thoſe viſibly as equal terms we eye,
Are not a cloſe and fix'd ſynonomy,
Each unabetted bravely ſtands alone,
And bears a marked virtue of it's own;
And hence the juſt gradation that pervades
Th' aſcent of words, their diff'rent lights and ſhades;
And hence diſtinctly are you to refer
The ſtrong contraſt, and neighb'ring character.

Are words deficient? Your intent proclaim,
Veil'd in a Roman, or a Grecian name;
Thoſe wealthy fountains, from whoſe ſources ſprung,
Words yield to the inflection of our tongue.

A modern

A modern term, refus'd an equal ſhare
Of ſenſe, ſhould ſeldom gain admittance there;
A foreign cuſtom is a caſe indeed,
From which ſuch rigid principles recede;
And proper names, which learning will include,
Have gen'ral titles, and themſelves intrude.
But all obſcure that common ſtyle we eye,
In diction looſe, and void of energy,
Which, Janus like, with fronts equivocal,
Now moves a Briton, and now ſtruts a Gaul.
Or ſeek ſupport, where words forgotten wait,
And ſoftly wake them from their dormant ſtate;
Cuſtom retrieve from ſtill oblivion's reign,
And words reduce to life and ſtrength again.
United words, if happily apply'd,
Grow new, and pleaſe our idiomatic pride;
This genuine growth aſſuredly declares
More art, and more compact expreſſion ſhares.
Converted parts of ſpeech in ſome we trace,
Which gain applauſe, if introduc'd with grace:
But here, as ev'ry where, exceſs alarms
The critic, and deſtroys the novel charms.

But he that hopes a perfect piece to ſee,
Muſt to one taſte bring all men to agree:
And then, in beſt attire, the muſe diſcloſe,
In melody of rhyme, or meaſur'd proſe.
The rigid critic, with contemptuous eye,
Low'rs at the remnants of barbarity;
With reaſon, as with candour on his ſide.
" Rhyme is the novel change of Gothic pride,
" Form'd to amuſe the ear, a poor pretence,
" And fill up the vacuity of ſenſe."
Deciſions theſe, which led the learn'd aſtray,
Borne by the tide of prejudice away;
Borne, by the ancient quantity, to draw
All principles into a common law;
Without attending to a maxim known,
That countries offer cuſtoms of their own;
That diff'rent ſtructures diff'rent rules enforce,
And what's rejected there, is here of courſe.
Combining cauſes give the true delight,
One way there is, which ever muſt be right;
And each plan elſe, tho' well you ſtrike the tool,
Is but a deviation from the rule.

What's poetry? A fancy'd art, deſign'd
To pleaſe the ear, and to exalt the mind.
Is rhyme a pleaſure? Let it ſtand to fame.
Is it redundant? Then efface the name.
Concurring pleaſures ſet us all on fire,
Yet ne'er ſucceed to equal our deſire;
And rhyme delights the ear, a noble ſenſe,
And this we argue as its juſt defence.
Diſdaining feebler charges, that impede
Such melody, as futile works indeed;
The great defect the warm opponent draws,
From the ſuppreſſion of the vary'd pauſe.
Yet, by a Maſter, open ſpace is found
For ſacred cadence, and the force of ſound;
O'er bars ſo low, he traverſes in ſong,
Or, like a torrent, ſweeps them all along.
And the returns of rhyme harmonious ſhine,
O'er the flat cloſes of the meaſur'd line.

The artiſt, aiming at a ſure ſucceſs,
Earneſt to pleaſe, and happy to expreſs,

The ſtatue offers to the public view,
But with the image gives the drap'ry too.
Figures of ſpeech, that ſo affect the heart,
That raiſe the paſſions by a ſudden ſtart,
That give the graces to each attitude,
Shade to the naked, manners to the rude,
Unto the muſe invariably belong,
As the rich dreſs, and elegance of ſong.
And ſuch with vigilance, the taſk of art,
Age will ſupply, and knowledge will impart;
Judgement adapts them, till itſelf ſurpaſt,
Art diſappears in nature's fire at laſt.

Firſt epithets, as ſimpleſt of the kind,
Regard with care, and weigh well in your mind.
Choſen with ſkill, with energy apply'd,
Juſt to the characters on ev'ry ſide,
They paint the objects to which they belong,
In truth of colours, and the glow of ſong;
Nicely the line, that marks the man, purſue;
Give or withhold where praiſe or cenſure's due;

In close description represent the form,
How rustling forests bend before the storm;
You see, where scowling clouds deface the skies,
With gath'ring terrors the rude storm arise,
Hear it, as boist'rous all along it pours,
With the woods whistling, howling o'er the shores.

In wilder range, as we the theme pursue,
The Muse indulges, and proceeds to view;
Thro' foreign realms, as lord of all she steers,
Proud and indignant of her proper spheres.
We see in metaphor, sublime and strong,
Life in the thought, and motion in the song:
The feather'd shaft, impatient of delay,
Quivers aloft, and wings it's rapid way;
Eager for blood, it aims a deadly blow,
And drinks, and dives, and rages in the foe.
When winter drags her hoary vest away,
And warmer suns enliven the glad day,
The fields exult, and the proud plants unfold,
With rival hues, their foliage of gold;
The birds too waken, and the woodlands ring,
Join in the choir, and hail returning spring!

Profuſe the wit, yet captious the complaint,
Where ſimiles appoſite need reſtraint;
Each bard arraign, impute the crime at large,
And Homer only glories in the charge.
Reflected luſtre to the ſong they bring,
Deduc'd from nature's clear and copious ſpring;
Rais'd from th' abyſs, where arts obſcurely reign,
The reader aſks a comment to explain.
Not mean tho' common, gay with conſequence,
Florid without, and plain within the ſenſe;
Juſt they muſt be, tho' not minutely nice,
Bold in the thought, yet cloſe to the device;
A ſimple act, with double ends in view,
To pleaſe the ſenſes, and inſtruct them too.

Th' allegory ſhrin'd within the tale,
Is ſhadow'd by a rich tranſparent veil;
Unhallow'd hands ſhould ne'er the drap'ry dare
To draw aſide, and ſhow the myſt'ry there.
Each part ſhould be coincident, 'tis odd
Where Bacchus types a bottle and a god;
Where ſhad'wy ſcenes a real air admit,
'Tis all a blind, tumultuous maſs of wit.

Self-promis'd

Self-promis'd bards, that for perfection ſtrive,
Muſt knowledge from each copious fount derive;
Thro' nature's ſcenes auguſt and awful roam,
And paint the diſtant Alps as if at home.
The wide world ſhould be perſonally known
And foreign ſcenes familiar as our own.
Here frolickſome, in wand'ring mazes green,
Nature delights in the romantic ſcene:
All order there unhanded wilds ſupplant,
And ſhe grows vaſt, and all extravagant.
Plains ſtretch immenſe, which mock the piercing eye,
And mountains top the habitable ſky;
A dreary ſilence thro' the waſte prevails,
While foreſts ruſtle with eternal gales;
Pent in the rocks, th' impetuous cat'ract ſtorms,
And headlong down the air it's paſſage forms;
With hideous fall, and thund'ring roar, it rakes
The diſtant mountains, and the foreſts ſhakes;
Fluſh'd from the ſteeps, now ſheds the dewy rain,
Breaks on the crags, and foams along the plain.
Fatigu'd with the magnificent and bold,
More pleaſing forms th' Italian ſcenes unfold;

There touch'd by art, and in rich verdure grown,
Nature unrival'd ſtands, and ſtands alone.
Or yet amus'd with fab'lous tale, you trace
The ſilent grot, and the Cumean place;
See, where Averno's odious billows led
To Hell's dread manſions, and the Furies' bed.
The ſpoils of time in one rude ſpot we trace,
And ſudden glory in another race;
There Thebes repines, for owls a vile repoſe,
The hundred gates, that once to empire roſe;
Here Ruſſian pride in graceful ſtory tells
Of capitals emerg'd from fiſher's cells,
How Peter ſeem'd above a mortal man,
And Catharine perfects, what the god began.
As midday ſuns the ſhadow's length affect,
So manners vary in a ſtrict reſpect.
Here with ſtern rigour tho' you blame a part,
With kind indulgence charge the erring heart;
Nature's verſe flows with dignity and eaſe,
In garb tho' ſimple, not averſe to pleaſe,
Still her muſe labours, as her motives tend,
Much to improve, and little to offend;

Still

Still ſhe in native innocence appears,
Clad in the bluſhes of Arcadian years.
Peruſe then manners, this is what we aſk,
Be this the firſt, and this the lateſt taſk;
E'en in the humble village you deſcry
Nature expreſs'd in great variety.
Obſerve with care, with nice diſcernment ſcan,
How changeling habits grow upon the man;
How choler varies in each diff'rent ſtage,
Forgiving youth, and obſtinate old age.
Know well the paſſions, not enforc'd by name,
But how they work upon the human frame;
The ſimple cauſe, and ſtrange effect explore,
And note the progreſs thro', and o'er and o'er;
Baſe luſt, pure honour from the face decide,
And grinning envy, and contentious pride.
In all adventures, ſcrupulouſly ſcan
The ſprings of action, that incite a man;
To the fond joys be intimately known,
And make the tear, and deep concern your own.
Much as we read, and further as we go,
We gather this, the more we have to know:

At ev'ry turn a novel ſcene we find,
And larger ſtill than what we left behind;
A thouſand beauties preſs upon the eye,
Ten thouſand we let paſs unnotic'd by.
Nature thro' this wide field, by diff'rent ways,
Creates ideas, and her forms conveys;
Tho' rude at firſt the notices we ſhare,
Soon are they model'd to a ſhape and air.
We feel inſpir'd, as things increaſe in name,
And all the works of nature feed the flame.

Curious we ſee, how endleſs motions tend,
By various meaſures to obtain their end;
While thro' her labours, as the active ſoul,
A fix'd ſimplicity pervades the whole.

But which juſt Nature taught to tune the reed,
Or uſe intrudes, or pleaſure claims the lead;
Let each inſenſibly in either ſlide,
Nor frown on this, nor ſport on th' other ſide;
By this wiſe feint to virtue we conduce,
And pleaſure make ſubordinate to uſe.

Yet works of obſcene tendency we muſt
Full freely cenſure, as they cauſe diſguſt;
For minds thus waken'd, cannot but ſuſpect,
And hit a meaning that is ſo direct;
Add, like the lover of an eaſtern bride,
Moſt chooſe themſelves to draw the veil aſide.
Immoral works, profeſſedly impure,
Unnotic'd go, as being paſt the cure:
Where wit, the rule of manners, is defy'd
Conſtraint ſhould follow on the Civil ſide.

Let years give ſanction to the ſpreading bays,
And age mature the projects youth aſſays;
'Tis by a juſt gradation we aſcend,
An axiom to advance before we end:
Th' attempt, that haſtes the fabric late begun,
Is ſure ſomewhere to leave the work undone;
A weakneſs totters at the baſe, or round
The pile, ſome pillar menaces the ground.
And as a neſtling eagle from on high
Views the ſire's compaſs thro' the liquid ſky;

Impatient of delay, that would produce
Her fire to prudence, and her wings to uſe,
She feigns a viſit to the golden day,
Prunes all her feathers, and aſſerts her way;
Imprudence hits her, all her ſp'rits recede,
Her wings forget the office that they need,
She plunges, flutters, and now ſkims amain,
Then falls, and ruſhes headlong on the plain.
So dies the muſe, whoſe liſping numbers try,
What labour, years, taſte, judgement muſt ſupply.

Beware, how Milo like, to ſtrength you truſt.
Milo to all but to himſelf was juſt.
In facing danger, and defying fate,
'Tis rare but that you over-eſtimate;
Some cleft unlucky cloſes on the hand,
And envy laughs to ſee the wit trepan'd.

As manners are offenſive without force
Of breeding, wit devoid of rule is coarſe.
Thoſe bold, rough lines, which fancy pants to write,
Art turns to form, and gives the poliſh bright;

Pure

Pure art o'er fancy muſt improve the thought,
For art is nature to perfection wrought.
Thro' the wide field that all extended lies,
Nature unfolds a choice before our eyes;
As floating humours ſuit with diff'rent food,
A world of evils, or an heav'n of good:
In the ſame garden that her roſes ſhed
Their ſweets, weeds rank and deleterious ſpread.
Here Shakeſpeare fail'd, ill-favour'd in his times,
The new dawn riſing from barbarian rhymes;
Here Shakeſpeare fail'd, he mov'd down nature's dance,
With many a grace, and much extravagance:
Oft where the Muſes in Majeſtic form,
Chimeras fume, and beaſtly Satyrs ſtorm.
Where Etna rages in her inmoſt womb,
And warring elements put on a gloom;
A lambent flame, ſoon tranſient, leads the way,
And hideous ſmoke in volumes clouds the day;
Black and tumultuous winds the lava round,
And rocks unſhapen mortify the ground:
The riſing ſummits diff'rent ſeaſons bring,
Gloomy as winter, or as blithe as ſpring,

Here the fields ſmile with an eternal youth,
There noiſy nature, ſullen, and uncouth.
So parts untaught to tread, untaught to ſoar,
Slide into error, and perplex the more;
Here with a flaſh they riſe above the mean,
There wild and horrid but deform the ſcene.

If faſhion leads, where folly points the goal,
Blockheads have taſte, and triflers have a ſoul.
Some wits intent are to adapt their rhymes,
To pleaſe th' inconſtant palate of the times:
Such ſcorn to grovel, like the ſhackled fool,
Who weighs each thought, and holds of written rule;
Art bends the knee, and proſtrate wit denotes,
How kindly ſcum upon the ſurface floats.
Unhappy Dryden, here thy cenſure's due,
The Muſe's ſcorn, and admiration too:
Thy needy ſacrifice to vicious taſte,
Upbraids thy times, and has thyſelf diſgrac'd.

Heedleſs of blame, yet ardent after fame,
Others, like nitre, catch at ev'ry flame;

Anon,

Anon, from ever-lab'ring thought are eas'd,
They tire the reader, but themſelves are pleas'd:
Without connection too, a fickle ſtate,
'Tis half the taſk to know to cultivate;
Tho' not ſuch quick returns on the purſuit,
There's more clear profit, and a richer fruit.
From ſtudy'd labour fame more laſting grows,
There's more to gather than we well ſuppoſe;
Aſk mother Earth, whoſe bounteous hand unlocks
The ſprings of plenty, and the gran'ry ſtocks,
Will ſhe with tillage, leſs intenſe, reſtore
The rich and copious crops, ſhe bore before.

Oft with the riſing ſun renew your pain,
And with the moon high-riding ceaſe again.
Speedy and ſure, while time ſurvives, perſiſt
T' exalt the banners, to which you enliſt;
Till ſtudy is a habit unconfin'd,
And labour grows familiar to the mind.
'Tis true, the bard moſt ſenſible we know
Of pleaſures, yet with care he orders ſo,

That no exceſs unhinge the ductile ſoul,
And cauſe a groaning ſpirit thro' the whole.
Retir'd, in ſtudy, be he ever found,
Let no rude foot invade the hallow'd ground;
Leave him to Phebus ſacrificing pray'r,
For ever dreaming, meditating there;
Inconverſant, without a care, or call,
Illuming all things, yet unſeen by all.
In vacant ſeaſons, be his wiſe reſort
With living patterns, and the poliſh'd court.
The witty fair of this tranſcendent iſle,
Myſteriouſly will teach the youth to ſmile;
By magic ſpell a dulcet charm infuſe,
And grace impart, and court'ſy to the muſe.
Yet error here, he knows not to divide
Between the ebbing, and the flowing tide;
Left by the Muſes, he forgets the charms
Of ſong, and revels in ſoft pleaſure's arms:
The Muſe returns, but ſtill each call you ſee
Spurn'd, and rejected to the laſt degree;
In vain wit knocks, and fineſt fancies roam
About the heart, the poet's not at home;

Nor

Nor wit he adds, nor fancy to the ſtore,
And the ſweet fugitives return no more.
Moments miſspent are moments loſt we know;
Your time to the beſt purpoſes beſtow.
Inform'd in books, with all the rules by heart,
From reading comes an unſubſtantial part;
A comment only upon other's rules;
Cloſe thinking make advance in nature's ſchools:
Think, and deviſe then, roll your copy o'er,
Each time returns it happier than before;
Art will improve; 'tis rare at firſt you find
But the rude ſketches of th' imperfect mind.
Leave to the butterfly the ſportive day,
And let the bookworm mope his time away,
Live on the pages of ſome hapleſs wit,
Here reſt his point, and here his ſoul ſubmit:
Thine be the taſk to wander unconfin'd,
To pen th' inſtructive moral to mankind;
Be thine, in fancy's ſprightly regions hurl'd,
To form new ſyſtems to th' admiring world.
And when the Muſe, with gen'rous ardour fir'd,
Burſts from the cavern, by the Maid inſpir'd;

O give

O give her licence, give her ſcope to range
In wildeſt ſallies, nor her fancy change:
Indulge the phrenzy to its utmoſt pow'rs,
And uſe the diſcipline in calmer hours.
This to the Muſe which much perfection draws
Together, and deſigns the world's applauſe;
Years are a need to order the rude ſtate,
So painful labour to co-operate.

Yet not the will commands the poet's lays,
Nor head laborious always wears the bays.
As when ſtormy waves, heaving mountain-high
Their heads, print briny kiſſes on the ſky,
A dead calm often follows on the ſtorm,
All ſunk, and ſmooth, and ſtill, and uniform.
So acts the Muſe, ſurpriz'd by ſudden fires,
Which ſpread avaſt, and cheriſh her deſires;
A phrenzy fills the irritable ſoul,
A lofty ſpirit then inſpires the whole:
Seiz'd with this phrenzy that exalts the mind,
She ſoars, and leaves the world afar behind;

The gaping crowd admire the mighty force,
And dext'rous judgement, that directs her courſe,
In raptures all to the bold flight attend,
Eye her with paſſion, and with rage commend.
But ſoon her efforts fail in the deſign,
She droops, and lingers in an abject line.
The mental pow'rs thus ſlacken'd, oft in vain
The Muſe attempts her ardour to regain;
Laborious, plodding, dry, and dull ſhe tries,
To rouſe her vigour, and reſume the ſkies,
But to the bathos ſhe miſtakes her flight,
Or loſt unenvy'd in the giddy height:
Unequal in the conteſt to command,
'Tis genius fails, and judgement's at a ſtand.
So rolls the veſſel off the weſtern main,
Check'd by a northern or an eaſtern rain;
She tacks, ſhe triumphs, but the ſurly wind
Beats on her ſide, and drives her far behind.
Again ſhe rights, but all in vain the hands
Bear up the helm, and try the diſtant lands,
'Till ſhifting gales a happy moment brings,
A moment foſt'ring, on celeſtial wings;

Then

Then off ſhe ſails, reliev'd an errant ſport,
Rides o'er the waves, and ruſhes into port.
Yet may we the dull faculties controul,
And waken all th' inquiry of the ſoul;
'Tis but a road in knowledge to impart,
In nature bold, or curious in art,
And wonder bears us from the gloomy ſphere,
Wonder, the offspring of th' eternal year!
We catch a ſpark from reading the ſublime
Of the great bards, which kindles up in time.
The pictur'd ſcenes, where genius forms the line,
Conſpire to force, and favour the deſign.
The pow'r of muſic, as with war, expands
The ſoul, and burſts apart the ſluggiſh bands.
And gen'rous love impels the Muſe along,
And virtue brightens with the riſing ſong,
And indignation vexes at a mean
Import, and nobly ſcorns th' inactive ſcene.
When theſe inſpiring arts ſhall fail, 'tis beſt
To wait till Phebus breathe within the breaſt;
Then from the God the Muſe reſumes the charge,
Wild from reſtraint, ſhe ranges out at large,

Fluſh'd

Fluſh'd with the ſpirit, ſhe renews the ſcheme,
Improves the plan, and richly paints the theme.

Peruſe the ancients, take a copy there,
To copy Homer is a mighty care;
There Genius ſits upon a throne ſublime,
Confeſs'd by ev'ry age, and ev'ry clime,
With all the flight of fancy, and the rod
Of art, the firſt and neareſt to the God.
Quick to diſcern, the ancients from the ſchool
Of nature drew, what we poſſeſs by rule.
Then let not envy ſtay the lib'ral hand,
But give to merit to the full demand;
Partial to none, but with yourſelf alone,
Read with attention, and with candour own,
" Moſt ancient reading is a mirrour true,
" Nature but proves reflected back to you."
Without a biaſs to ſet truth aſide,
A prejudice to open, or to hide,
Conceit to tickle, and amuſe an hour,
Or heed to faſhion, which diſhonours pow'r;

Without this ſervile, inconſiſtent band,
Which whim conceiv'd, and folly nurs'd at hand,
Spontaneous iſſued, to aſſiſt the heart,
The firſt and nobleſt prodigies of art.
Patterns like theſe accept, by theſe you're taught,
A finer model, and a juſter thought.
In native majeſty a Raphael ſtalks,
Graceful is Guido in devotion's walks;
You trace the ſymmetry, and learn the line
That nature moves in, ſee how all combine,
How form'd from life the rival pencil caught
The breathing feature, and expreſſive thought;
Art preſs on genius, and the glorious ſtrife
Verge near the brink of nature into life.
What tho' ſuch profit from each wit you tare,
Nor mimic fancy, nor defect is there;
The buſy bee, that toils the livelong hour,
Pries in each ſhrub, and ſips the faireſt flow'r,
Rich from the ſweets of foreign atoms grown,
With juſtice claims the honey as her own.
Nature purſue ſuccinctly as you can,
You riſe the image of ſome ancient plan,

A comic

A comic ſcene that Terence left behind,
Or grave where Sophocles affects the mind,
The courtly morals Flaccus did ſupply,
Or Iliad with her locks above the ſky.

To ſit, and to admire each ancient plan,
Is all we do, but not the moſt we can;
Deſpair we may, and little get beſide,
But ſov'reign pity, and a check to pride:
Men may pronounce, and yet 'tis hard to tell,
Why wit, as modern arts ſhould not excel.
Err we from nature? then 'tis nature's part
T' apply the balſam, and to ſooth the heart:
But art now ſurer trains to excellence,
And nature, ever bounteous, gives us ſenſe;
Her ways are equal, tho' but little known,
So all our wrongs are fancies of our own.

END OF THE FIRST PART.

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